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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

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REPORT
OF THE
COMMITTEE
OF THE
NEW YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
ON A
NATIONAL NAME,
MARCH 31, 1845.

THE Committee, appointed by a resolution of the Society of the 4th instant, upon the subject of the irrelevant appellation, at present used for this country, with the view of enquiring whether a geographical name might not be suggested more distinctive and significant, and more likely to promote national associations, and prove efficient in History, Poetry, and Art; beg leave to Report:

That while they cannot expect to present new views of a subject, that from time to time, since the commencement of our national existence, has engaged the attention of some of our most eminent and patriotic citizens, they have still hopes, that some valuable and often repeated suggestions may be so presented to this society, as to secure its favorable attention, and through it, that of our countrymen generally, and ultimately to result in the adoption of a national name.

When we speak of a national name, we mean of course one that is both single and distinctive. The formula "United States of America" is neither. Being a phrase, from which it is impossible to derive an adjective, we have no means of describing ourselves, but by a circumlocution. We cannot even say "United States of America men;" if we say "United Staters," we laugh at ourselves, and if we call ourselves "Americans," we use a word that at present belongs to the whole hemisphere. Nor has the phrase the merit even of being distinctive. There are on this continent four or five "United States." "United States of North America" as some will have it, is scarcely more accurate. North America has three "United States" already, our own, the United States of Central America, and the United States of Mexico. In

fine, "United States of America" has now scarcely more appropriateness to us than United States of Europe would have to the provinces of France, or to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.*

If this were not one nation, but a confederacy of different nations, without a homogeneous population, or a common character, we might not need a general name. The names of the different nations composing the confederacy, would sufficiently distinguish their respective citizens, and for the confederacy itself any description, as in the case of the "quadruple alliance" or the "holy alliance" might suffice. Pennsylvanian, Vermontese, or Virginian, might serve as a distinctive appellation in any part of the world, if Pennsylvania, or Vermont, or Virginia, were great and powerful enough to be of any account, beyond the pale of our Union, and might be sufficient for all purposes, if the Pennsylvanian, the Vermontese, and the Virginian, were not also fellow country-

* The following are examples of the manner in which our anomalous state is mentioned by foreigners:

"America has not even a poetical name to ring the changes upon, and in the last extremity of distress, the poets sometimes call her the Western Star! One of them, in a sort of despair, expresses doubts whether she has properly any distinctive designation whatever; and considering that America is the name of the whole continent; that Columbia never actually adopted is now "repudiated;" that North America includes Canada, Greenland, Mexico and Texas; that the term "United States" applies equally to the Southern Confederation; and that there is nothing left, native to the soil, except the ludicrous New England title of Yankee, it *does* seem as if the founders of the Republic forgot to give it a name."—*Foreign Quarterly Review*, January, 1844.

"One of the most distinguished geographers of the Union, Mr. Tanner, correctly remarks, that this confederation offers the geographical anomaly of an immense country, without a proper name. In fact, we find 'United States' in Europe, in the Ionian Islands—'United States' in North America, in the confederations of Mexico and Central America—'United States' in South America, in the *ci-devant* vice-royalty of Rio de la Plata, and we are on the point of seeing others spring up, by the division of the Republic of Colombia. We had made the same remark long ago; and for some years we have proposed the names of Anglo-American Confederation, and Anglo-Americans, to designate the soil and the inhabitants of this important part of the new world. These denominations, based principally upon the origin of the great mass of the inhabitants, have been already adopted in many works of merit, and we think we can, without inconvenience, use them provisionally, until it shall please Congress to give them a convenient name."—*Balbi Abrégé de Géographie*, p. 1015.

men, and for that reason in need of a word to signify their common relation.

If we are, what we boast, one people, and one nation, "*e pluribus unum*," with national traits, national impulses, a general history, and a common character, let us have a word significant of that unity. Let us have a sign in our language that such a **NATION** exists.

We believe that the people of all the states of this Union are one people; that they have national characteristics, and national ideas; that they are one in heart as one in character; with sympathies and bonds older than governments and stronger than laws; and that if they were to-day broken into a score of republics, they would remain, like the Germans, one people, though many nations.

What we want is a sign of our identity. We want utterance for our nationality. We want a watchword more national than that of states, more powerful than that of party. We want the means of proclaiming by one word our union into one nation. We desire to see written on the pages of the world's history, one name, in which no other people shall have part or lot, that shall signify to the old world the Great Republic beyond the Ocean; a word that shall represent the idea of a united and homogeneous people; that shall be associated with our history and progress; that shall rest upon our flag and go with our advancing eagles.

Let it not be thought a mere matter of convenience. It is more. It has much to do with national and heroic sentiment. The intimate relation between language and sentiment is as certain as any law of nature. Mean ideas will be associated with mean words. And a nation will get a *nick-name*, if it has no other.

Our condition is altogether anomalous. There never before has been a nation, of any consequence in the world, without its own appropriate, distinctive name. The great nations that have hitherto arisen, have made their names "a spell in story." And who can doubt that the names themselves re-acted as a spell upon their people, prompting them to heroic deeds, heightening and concentrating their love and pride of country. Nationality must express itself in words. If it finds none it will dissipate itself and disappear. True patriotism, then, not less than taste and convenience, prompt us to seek for it some adequate expression.

In our own case the necessities of language and the peculiar circumstances of our history, have led to a double use of the name of the continent. Custom has sought to supply what the early legislation of the country should not have omitted. The word "America" is to some extent used indiscriminately for the country and for the continent. This, while seeming to relieve us in part from the embarrassments, consequent upon our want of

name, has really increased them by leading to confusion and uncertainty in language.

The origin of this double use is well known. At the breaking out of the revolution, the whole hemisphere was colonial. Our only relations were with England. These colonies and Canada were her *American* provinces. When they began to act together, they hoped for the union of Canada, and they assumed to act as the United Provinces of *America*. The rest of the continent in its then secluded and colonial dependence was of small account in the eyes of the revolted provinces. In their view the continent embraced only themselves. Their congress was the continental congress, their army the continental army, as distinguished from the provincial congresses and troops. When they declared their independence, they did it as the United States of *America*. They afterwards formed their confederation and their constitution under the same title. There were then no other *STATES* in *America*.

But since then the face of the New World has changed. Spain and the Indies are severed. The hemisphere is covered with nations. To the south of the great lakes, with one exception, there is not a single colony. We are no longer the only states of *America*.

We want now, more than ever before, a distinctive appellation. On this subject we will venture to quote the following passage from a letter of WASHINGTON IRVING, published some years ago. "We want a national name. We want it poetically, and we want it politically. With the poetical necessity of the case," says that most tasteful of writers, "I shall not trouble myself. I leave it to our poets to tell how they manage to steer that collocation of words, 'The United States of North America,' down the swelling tide of song, and to float the whole raft out upon the sea of heroic poesy. I am now speaking of the mere purposes of common life. How is a citizen of this republic to designate himself? As an American? There are two Americas, each subdivided into various empires, rapidly rising in importance. As a citizen of the United States? It is a clumsy, lumbering title, yet still it is not distinctive; for we have now the United States of Central America; and heaven knows how many United States may spring up under the Proteus changes of Spanish America.

"This may appear matter of small concernment; but any one that has travelled in foreign countries, must be conscious of the embarrassment and circumlocution sometimes occasioned by the want of a perfectly distinct and explicit national appellation. In France, when I have announced myself as an American, I have been supposed to belong to one of the French colonies; in Spain, to be from Mexico or Peru, or some other Spanish American country. Repeatedly have I found myself in a long geographical and political definition of my national identity.

"The title of American may serve to tell the quarter of the world to which I belong, the same as a Frenchman or an Englishman may call himself a European; but I want my own peculiar national name, to rally under. I want an appellation that shall tell at once, and in a way not to be mistaken, that I belong to this very portion of America, geographical and political, to which it is my pride and happiness to belong: that I am of the Anglo-Saxon race, which founded this Anglo-Saxon empire in the wilderness; and that I have no part or parcel with any other race or empire, Spanish, French, or Portuguese, in either of the Americas. Such an appellation would have magic in it. It would bind every part of the confederacy together, as with a key stone; it would be a passport to the citizen of our republic, throughout the world."

Nothing that we could say would add to the force of this language.

What then is the remedy?

If it were possible to retain and appropriate strictly to ourselves the name of America, and to substitute Columbia as the name of the continent, we should be able by one act, to give a beautiful name to our own country, and to do justice to the discoverer of the New World. It was a strange caprice of fortune that robbed Columbus of his right to name what he discovered. In the earliest narratives of the voyages of himself and his immediate followers, this is called the New World. (*Novus Orbis*.) Amerigo Vespucci made a voyage to the Brazils in 1501, and the narrative of the voyage represented him as the first person who had seen the main land. The district of coast which he visited was designated at first by his name, and by degrees as the shape of the continent was developed by succeeding voyagers, the name thus given to a part, fastened itself upon the whole. Columbus had, however, seen the main land, opposite Trinidad, as early as 1498; and if the first sight of the land gave the right of name, the southern continent should have been called Columbia, and the northern named after Cabot, who first discovered it as early as 1497. But both continents, and all the west were in fact laid open to the old world by Columbus, and his name, if any one name, should have been given to the whole.

It would be a memorable instance of the justice, with which Time rewards true greatness, if, after the lapse of three centuries, during which the old world had acquiesced in the wrong to Columbus, the first great empire established in the New World, which his genius and daring laid open to the Old, should illustrate its first century of dominion by restoring his name to the hemisphere. We wish it were reserved to this country to do itself and Columbus justice, by an act so sublime. And we do not despair of yet seeing his name borne by the southern continent, as distinguished from the northern, while the latter retains the

name of America. But a change of the name of the continent would require the concurrence of other nations, which it might be impossible to obtain. In that view a specific geographical name for this country is indispensable.

Where should it be found? It should be found in some of those great natural features, the eternal works of the Almighty, which man cannot remove or change, and which belong to the whole country. It must be sought in our mountains, or our lakes, or our rivers. If we look there, we find one, and only one sufficiently national and unappropriated, the Alleghanian or Apalachian chain of mountains, that vast chain which sees on its eastern declivities the States of the Atlantic, and casts its shadow westward to the Father of Rivers. The Chippewan, or Rocky Mountains, our only other great range, are too little familiar to us. No one of the northern lakes is national enough. And our only national river, with its tributaries, has already given name to six of our States, Mississippi, Arkansas, Missouri, Tennessee, Ohio, and Illinois.

Irving proposed a name from the Alleghanian range, and the more we have reflected upon it, the more appropriate it seems to us. He says in the letter from which we have already quoted—

“We have it in our power to furnish ourselves with such a national appellation, from one of the grand and eternal features of our country; from that noble chain of mountains which formed its back-bone, and ran through the old confederacy, when it first declared our national independence. I allude to the Apalachian or Alleghany Mountains. We might do this without any very inconvenient change in our present titles. We might still use the phrase, ‘The United States,’—substituting Apalachia, or Alleghania, (I should prefer the latter,) in place of America. The title of Apalachian, or Alleghanian, would still announce us as Americans, but would specify us as citizens of the Great Republic. Even our old national cypher of U. S. A. might remain unaltered, designating THE UNITED STATES OF ALLEGHANIA.”

In our view, nothing can be found more appropriate than some derivative from the grandest natural feature of the country; one that is common to the north and south; the longest and the highest chain of mountains, east of the Oregon range; the back-bone of the original thirteen states; and the dividing ridge between the Atlantic rivers and the great central valley of the continent.

To this ridge our country is indebted for a great part of its beauty and healthfulness. If it had not been raised as a barrier to the waters from the west, now turned southward to the gulf of Mexico, the rivers from the Rocky Mountains, swollen by the intervening streams, would have found their way to the sea across the continent, and made the Atlantic States low and unhealthy, like the country on the Amazon and Orinoco.

It also binds the country together, as with a band of iron. By

turning the waters of the Mississippi valley into one channel, and thereby creating a political necessity that they who inhabit the upper regions and sources of the rivers should command their outlet, it makes it impossible for any portion of the valley to separate itself from the rest, while the seaboard is too narrow and too dependant upon the interior to maintain a separate political existence. If the Alleghanian ridges had been extended further north, so as to turn the St. Lawrence southward, Canada would long ago have been a part of this confederation. That part of America, therefore, which we inhabit, is in fact, whatever we may choose to call it, Alleghanian America.

The appellation moreover comes from the aboriginal inhabitants, whose names, though we have driven themselves out, still cling and will cling forever to the highest peaks of the land. But more than that, it comes from that primordial race, more ancient than our nomadic tribes, beyond which no Indian tradition can go; that wide spread people, whose mysterious history, dimly shadowed by their vast mounds in the wilderness, call up so many images of durability, of power, of wide embracing sway; images to which our progress of empire has given new vitality.

The name of the Alleghanian ridge is associated also with the best parts of our own history; with colonial adventure, and revolutionary heroism. What so fitting as that it should give name to the land, which it overlooks.

But how, it may be asked, can this object be accomplished? How can the name be brought into use? We answer, by the agreement of our people. Satisfy them of its fitness, and they will assuredly adopt it. The time is favorable. Our intercourse with the rest of the world has so extended itself, that the number of those who have personally felt the inconvenience of our want of name, is greater than it ever was before. Our literature is growing fast into a vigorous manhood. COOPER has already made our Indian names classical in every language of Europe. The term of the Republic has but just begun. What are seventy years in the life of a people; a life which measures itself by centuries.

Towards the accomplishment of so desirable an object, this society may do something. If it expresses its own views; if it asks for the co-operation of other societies, and of public men; if it commends the subject to writers and teachers; and finally, if it shall press it upon the consideration of Congress; it will not have gone beyond the sphere of its proper duties, and will have done all that it can do towards an end so worthy of effort.

In conclusion, we beg leave respectfully to recommend the adoption of the following resolutions:

First. That it is expedient that efforts should now be made to unite upon a **SPECIFIC GEOGRAPHICAL NAME** for the country;

and while this Society disclaims any pretension to decide upon a question of such general interest, yet, as the object is of common concern, and any successful movement in regard to it, must begin among the people, we venture, for want of others to undertake it, to bring the subject before them, in the hope that the requisite action may be no longer delayed.

Second. That the name of Allegania* be recommended as the best, considering that it is derived from the grandest and most useful natural feature common to the whole country, an eternal type of strength and union, stretching from the Gulf of Mexico to the great lakes; that it is associated with the most interesting portions of our history; and that in adopting it we should restore to the land one of the primordial titles of the aborigines.

Third. That a letter be addressed by the society to other historical societies and to eminent citizens in different parts of the country, asking their concurrence and co-operation in bringing the name before the people.

Fourth. That the want of a specific name for our country being an essential defect in elementary works of education, it be proposed to the authors of school books and maps, to designate this country hereafter as the "Republic of Allegania."

All which is respectfully submitted.

DAVID DUDLEY FIELD.

HENRY R. SCHOOLCRAFT.

CHARLES FENNO HOFFMAN.

New York, March 31st, 1845.

* It might perhaps be pronounced Algania, the four first letters "Alle" as one syllable.

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